This Earth Day, Let’s Focus on Results Instead of Rhetoric

He was not hard to spot. In the shadows of Oxford Castle, under the dome of the Bodleian Library, or even the tower of St. Mary’s Church, the titular feather headress was impossible to miss. As was the face of the man who wore it. Chief Tahdzi Usher, the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, and he, after all, is in charge of it. Oxford University. Among the many entities that have been in place for centuries, his name is inextricably linked to the story of Social Entrepreneurship. Hence, where the history of the place is so closely intertwined with the name of the man, it is only natural that he should be the subject of this Earth Day, a day so historic, a day that celebrates the spirit of innovation, of new ideas, of progress, and of change. Not one day, but several, decades upon decades of scholarly thought and taxing architecture, but an even older history—of the people who make the trees and the land their home.

Tahdzi took the long journey from his village in the northwest corner of Rwanda to join more than 1,000 social entrepreneurs at the conference. There, Hakva Youssouf, the President of the Pakistan TALIB led the discussion for open questioning about what they observed, both a ground-up practice, but of innovation and renewal, whose voices may not have spoken for themselves. Experts spoke of important considerations, sustainable development, and much more. And in a roomful of people, we all sat and spoke. Chief Tahdzi spoke of the needs of the people, the fear of their headliness resulting against the love stoved soil, the voice of the people. The often-forgotten individuals, who are struggling to keep their way of life and traditions alive despite the face of economic challenges, such as illegal logging and mining. They are fighting for the environment, often disguised as the “sage of the forest.”

As incredible as it might seem, there is one more view to the planet that has brought Tahdzi to the TEDx conference and the social entrepreneurs who for five decades have been the backbone of Oxford’s mission to translate and uphold the voice of the people and other influential leaders who could work with modern communities to save the world’s forests.

Throughout the week, conference participants panelled economic markets in the context of social entrepreneurship in further talks and seminar sessions, drawing hybrid business models, “Profit With Purpose,” small-scale production, how do organizations like the Vatican in its efforts to translate and uphold the voice of the people and other influential leaders who could work with modern communities to save the world’s forests.

One can’t describe, isolated, the first group of forest stewards encounter today’s technology and the business models of modern markets—and more importantly, how emerging financial instruments like the forest carbon financing mechanism (REDD) can reset the value and structure of a Plant of the future. The answer to these questions may remain the kind of economic success story that is not at the center of the future. It is in the intersection of these two elements—the old and the new—that we see the potential for significant impact and unique initiatives that will empower forest-dependent communities to engage equitably and productively in the management of forests, including carbon markets and other collaborative initiatives. In short, it is called ASERI—which stands for Accelerating Social Entrepreneurship and Innovative Markets—and it is a platform for partnerships and initiatives that we are at the forefront of leading these discussions, and ensuring that the voices of the people are heard. We believe in the power of the people to make a difference, and we are optimistic that with the right strategies, we can make a significant impact on the most pressing issues we face together.

On Earth Day this year, let us focus on this social topic. As an environmental artist and poet, she is the voice of the trees, and the stories we tell about the world. However, we cannot forget that the voices of the people are the voice of the future. As Chief Tahdzi said, “Earth Day is one of us has a responsibility to our Mother Earth.”

Chief Tahdzi Usher in Oxford